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ABSTRACT

Planning, both as an academic field and as a profession, is in a dilemma involving the adoption of two contradictory public philosophies. The more established philosophy orients itself to the efficiency of the whole system, while the second orients to particular groups and claims that adequate participation in the system is denied these groups as well as those for whom planners play an advocate role. This paper argues that the efficiency of the whole system and the needs of disadvantaged groups must be furthered. Two kinds of knowledge can contribute to solving the dilemma: (1) concepts and measurements of the attribute and benefit distribution through the system and across groups and localities; and (2) theories capturing the dynamics of redistributive processes, linking the fortunes of groups to characteristics of the whole system. (Author/MLF)

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DISTRIBUTIONS AND REDISTRIBUTIVE PROCESSES: TWO FOCI FOR PLANNING EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

Delivered at the 1970 AIP CONFER-IN,
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DISTRIBUTIONS AND REDISTRIBUTIVE PROCESSES: TWO FOCI FOR PLANNING EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

This paper is about the directions planning education might take in the next ten years. From our thoughts about education we also describe some implications for the effects of the profession on American society. Our position is that planning--as an academic field and as a profession--is in a dilemma, the resolution of which will require particular kinds of exchanges with the more traditional social sciences.

In brief summary, the dilemma involves the adoption by different parts of the profession of two contradictory, overly-simple, and in the long run, untenable, public philosophies, each with attendant academic and research traditions. One of these, the more established one, is an orientation to the efficiency of the whole system which carries with it an assumption of a unitary public interest stated by a consensus arrived at in the political system. The second, rapidly coming to prominence, is an orientation to particular groups, sub-systems, for which it is claimed adequate participation in the system is denied and for whom planners play an advocate role. Our argument is that both the efficiency of the whole system and the needs of disadvantaged groups must be furthered, that neither of the two positions contributes adequately to both, and that the way out of the dilemma is to specify the types of knowledge that can contribute to solving and articulating the two problems simultaneously. If this can be done, the result will be to create roles for planners which bridge the present gap between those advocating system efficiency, on the one hand, and the interests of particular groups, on the other. We think the kinds of knowledge we should focus on are two: concepts and measurement of the distribution of various kinds of attributes and benefits through the system and across different groups and localities; and theories capturing the dynamics of redistributive processes, linking the fortunes of groups--subsystems--to characteristics of the whole system. If planners can develop and use these kinds of knowledge, then they can take on roles at both the system and subsystem level which reinforce one another and contribute to common theory and information resources despite conflicts on particular issues.

I. Rationalism and System Efficiency

One of the moving forces of modern industrial society has been the rapid development of technical ways of solving problems. This technology is now established in the social system in large-scale organizations--to some extent, in municipal bureaucracies. It is relevant to this, in fact, that one of the important technical expressions of the municipal reform movements in the first half of the twentieth century was the development of city planning, with at least the rudiments of rational techniques. More recently, techniques of

decision-making and information processing have emerged as a manifestation of the still underlying technical theme./1 Planning schools have participated in the development of these new techniques, and have applied analytical efficiency concepts to the fields of urban planning and regional development/2

These innovations in ways of thinking have notably improved upon the traditional concepts embodied in the profession. We have broadened our concerns far beyond physical problems in city planning. We have moved from concentration on a plan, a document that specifies end states, to concentration on the process of changing states./3 There is still conflict over these issues both in and out of the schools, but--with regard to technique--the dominance of the more sophisticated view seems certain./4

In a more fundamental sense, though, the new decision theorists and the traditional planners have a good deal in common. Basically, they both depend on a belief in a consensus of values, a public interest. They assume not only that there is a single set of rules to which everyone agrees, but further that there is basic agreement about the goals of society, even about the division of spoils. Planning agencies are directed to consider alternative actions, estimate likely outcomes, and evaluate these outcomes from some public estimate of goodness. The system seems to break down when it is required to take into account a set of values external to formal authority./5 It is hardly necessary to think beyond the kinds of opposition that neighborhoods have on occasion put up against city-directed urban renewal programs. Here, essentially, the same outcomes are being evaluated by two value systems: that of the city-hall, and that of the neighborhood.

We should note that use of this rationalistic process implies an essentially conservative philosophy, for it precludes or at least ignores changes in distribution of rewards or changes in the rules. Many critiques of planning have really been leveled at this assumption of clear public interest, with a necessity only for rationality to improve policy-making./6

II. Advocacy Planning

Along with the emergence of powerful managerial tools, American society has witnessed the appearance or perpetuation of groups of people not benefitting in any discerable way from the new techniques, stranded from the main body of the country./7 As a result, in the area of urban development and in other areas of social policy there has in many quarters developed the view that rational decision processes as currently developed, and perhaps social science generally, are not part of the answer. The problem of improving public decision processes is conceived not as one requiring narrow rationality, but conscious identification of special, neglected interests. This critique of the rationalistic approach has been made by proponents of advocacy planning, social planning, and field work. The most widely advertised aspects of this approach are its anti-research bias and its great

problem orientation./8 It also results in conflict: it inevitably leads to reaction from planners of the previous viewpoint./9

Like the traditional planners, those who hold the advocacy position presume to know what the problems are, and to a great extent what the solutions are: again, the problem is mainly implementation. In fact, there is considerable convergence on methods and techniques: a good deal of physical planning, much use of federal programs, etc. But, of course, the two planners are often trying to implement different things. Unfortunately, there is little theoretical guidance available for those who would espouse the advocacy position, despite encouragement of their efforts as a practical course.

III. New Emphases for Planning Education

Our view is that neither of the two positions just described will lead us much further. Further development of rationalism from the "efficiency" perspective is truly a continuing process in our society, but the main problem for us will be to understand it and its distributive effects, not to form its leading edge in the most modern sectors of society./9 On the other hand, simple advocacy of the interests of sub-groups--which amounts to a policy of redistribution considered apart from system efficiency--cannot lead very far either. The stark contrasts in the two positions, while cathartic, mask any viable routes to power for those groups the advocate planners would represent.

In the meantime, we have managed to contain--however unstably--these two traditions within the profession and in our professional schools. As long as this remains the case it is a worthwhile hope that new types of exchanges with social science will occur with the potential to re-invigorate planning education and give a sense of direction to the profession. We will try in what follows to identify some possibilities.

Distributions

One of the fundamental problems that must be faced directly is the study of the distribution of things: of people, of economic opportunity, of investments, of well-being. These are the issues being contended by advocate planners working for disadvantaged parts of the system, yet neither they nor partisans of the "establishment" make systematic use of concepts, measurement techniques, or data which might contribute to resolution of the issues.

One area of planning, however, has contributed to some extent. Urban and Regional Spatial Theory, an integral element of most planning training, has at times probed deeply into the more economic aspects of distributions. /10 Developments in urban economics, geography, regional science, human ecology, and other fields concerned with the location and movement of people and their activities, besides being centrally important in urban and regional planning, seem in their treatment of distributions to complement and

provide context for the shifts we have seen from "efficiency" to "advocacy".

However, most urban and regional theory has shied clear of controversial distributional questions, just as most of it has ignored the difficulty of redistributive implementation. Most of this theory is equilibrium-biased, assuming relatively uniform distributions of political power, economic resources, and information, so that minor disturbances are righted automatically. It is normally assumed by the theory, for example, that investors will move into low-wage areas, causing wages to rise, and that migration will similarly tend to equalize and stablize wage levels, returns on investment, and general development patterns. Of course, we know from more careful observation that such adjustments do not always happen. Big, high-wage cities often seem to regenerate growth while small ones decline./11 Neighborhoods are locked into relative social levels, and when they shift it is often not simply a small adjustment to a new equilibrium, as the human ecologists would claim, but also a dramatic shift in population and style. The most satisfactory static explanation of these rigidities and shifts seems to be that power, resources and information are in fact not uniformly spread among participants, but are skewed and concentrated in a number of ways: some groups have the capability of compounding their advantages, while others are unable to resist erosion of the few they have.

Nevertheless, there has been some useful work in urban and regional theory. The fact that many policy decisions are made on the basis of measures of relative regional welfare has forced analysts in this field to work simultaneously with aggregative, national indices of welfare and sub-national distributive measures./ 12 A good deal of work has attempted to measure local economic impact of public investments, such as highways. There are a number of abstract growth models that show shifts from region to region and sector to sector./13 Also, there has been extensive and deep concern among scholars in this field with problems of stranded groups, such as the poor of Appalachia or Nova Scotia, the blacks of urban ghettos, or the poor of working class neighborhoods./14 Because locational characteristics are fundamental to the identification and understanding of some of the problems facing these stranded people, city and regional planners have struggled with their problems. Such concerns have led to the development of accounting techniques for sub-national areas, which have illuminated previously unidentified problems and isolated important influences. Descriptive statistics, primarily from the census but also from other sources, have been widely used to indicate relative levels of income in neighborhoods and in small town and rural areas, in order to measure the effect of public programs on their inhabitants./15

Also, new concern with growth and development internal to small social systems has appeared in urban and regional studies. Controversy over the mechanisms of regional development has spawned research into the role of institutional factors in development, and has challenged traditional development theories./16 For example, there have been interesting speculations about

capacities of different cities to produce and accept entrepreneurs,/17 others about dynamic movement of ethnic groups into controlling positions in urban industrial sectors./18 Finally, where urban and regional theory has cautiously moved into social planning, particularly while looking at health systems, deep examinations of efficiency questions have forced re-examination of distributional questions. For example, measures of the efficiency of ambulance service must contend with various viewpoints when defining outputs: response time to different neighborhoods, costs to different clientele, various kinds of services, assignments of costs to levels of injury and sickness./19

With all this, distribution and its measurement remains a secondary concern in spatial theory. A majority of theorists are concerned with efficiency and accept the ideology of the unitary public interest. Only a minority share the concerns we have mentioned above. The point is that there is much to be exploited in the field, and much more than at present should be done.

Redistributive Processes

A further area needing exploitation is the study of the processes by which changes in distribution occur. If there has been insufficient emphasis on the distributive aspects of urban systems in urban theory, the avoidance of the process of redistribution is largely an abyss, a subject tabooed for public discussion in most circles. Aside from the common sense observation that all interest groups tend to struggle for a share of the benefits of public policy, which has had a good deal of attention from pluralist political theorists, little notion of the fundamental processes of redistribution percolates to political decision-makers or planners. They know that urban renewal, neighborhood parks, and zoning laws benefit the poor less than they are supposed to, but they have little in the way of a theory that would tell them why this is, or how they could improve the situation in the future.

Planning researchers can approach this problem, it seems to us, from two directions, for both of which suggestions have been advanced in the social science literature. First, they can undertake empirical studies of particular kinds of public policies to determine their distributive effects. From such a descriptive approach, one might expect to gain insights into the causes of changes in distributions, if one were looking for them. Alan Altshuler recently suggested such a tack: policies should be analyzed for their potential "trickle-down" of benefits to the poor or various groups./20 He argued that analysts tend either to assume that policies aimed at system efficiency have pervasive benefits (the efficiency approach); or they assume trickle-down is counter-productive for the poor and focus on direct programs. Nevertheless, he argues, it stands to reason that some system-oriented policies have more trickle-down than others, and it will be advantageous to know what these are. Improvements in air terminals as well as improvements in metropolitan highways may both be elite inspired projects; but the side-benefits to the poor of the latter are apt to be much more direct. Janet

Reiner's analysis of the impact of public policies on various client populations is in a similar vein./21 If there is a main stream tradition in "social planning" it is perhaps in essentially similar analyses of the impacts of particular programs and projects on particular disadvantaged populations. Often, the impacts described are for particular groups and the redistributive impacts over the whole system are not adequately accounted for, but there is something of a beginning that can be improved upon here, nevertheless.

In a somewhat different vein from these empirically grounded approaches to understanding redistributive processes, there are theoretical schemes which may prove fruitful if tested in situations of interest to planners. One such scheme which we have had particular interest in predicts the emergence to prominence of particular groups on the basis of the development of group solidarity and characteristics of the larger system and the groups' standing in it./22 The solidarity dimension points up one element usually missing in efficiency approaches. Those schemes aimed at the whole system are usually beset with the necessity to assume that all segments of society can somehow partake of general growth. For the disadvantaged, this has implied either a filtering down and adoption of benefits meant for general consumption (for example, improved learning technology developed in middle-class schools); or upward mobility opportunities which could be seized by particular members of disadvantaged groups. Left out of the formula has been any concept of the social support necessary for such adoption or mobility--as, for example, is often supplied by the parents of high-achieving school children. Solidarity provides this and even more. In addition to indicating how the disadvantaged might "fit into the system", it suggests that they might develop the force to actually modify the way the system is constructed or develops.

The second factor, characteristics of the larger system and the sub-system's links to it, represents a conceptual bridge between the usual concerns of the planner with system efficiency, and the concerns of advocate planner with a particular subsystem. One intriguing aspect of this formulation suggests that external aid--which might include flows of funds, externally supported change agents, or the coopting of leaders in higher level politics--can be disruptive to group solidarity, rather than a positive factor in group development. The details of this theoretical approach are impractical to relate here, but two implications for our dilemma can be stated. First, the nature of the model both supports and in some senses contradicts parts of the advocacy approach. For example, although external activists might supply some resources useful for a neighborhood's successful participation in a Model Cities program, they might at the same time break down internal organization by providing too much linkage to city hall, coopting leaders and encouraging them to compromise when more might be gained by conflict. Actually, our experience is ambiguous on this issue, but our main conclusion is that any theory which links the activities of those in central positions in the larger

system (e.g. how to distribute patronage and other discretionary rewards, when to intervene in subsystems, how strictly to stick to rules) to those in control of subsystems (e.g. whether to compromise, or fight on an issue; whether to spend time on internal activities or, instead, on contacts with potential allies or sources of funds) has the potential to link the efficiency and the advocacy subcultures now existing in the planning profession. Theoretical links between system and subsystem activities and attitudes seem, in fact, to be one of the main needs we have as a profession and field of study. Without them, it is all but impossible to make the transition to a real subsystem concern (e.g. useful activity in support of the poor, blacks, etc.). For example, repeatedly successful "agents" of social change are often successful because they are able to recognize conditions under which the component social system (neighborhood) is ready to pop, when some external resources may help, and when the larger system can be attacked successfully.

IV. Will Planning Change?

What we have been describing are, of course, only possibilities for a union of two planning subcultures through an infusion of ideas now developing in social science. What governs whether this will occur? Do the concepts and theoretical schemes mentioned above represent a trend in social science; if so, can planners effectively link up to them? Or can planners themselves have an impact on the kinds of ideas that develop?

Actually, our impression is that the normal course of social science disciplines is quite conservative, and that ideas of the sort we have described have developed in spite of, rather than because of, the dominant biases in fields like economics, sociology and psychology. Regional and urban studies have never been prominent in these fields, and have been facilitated as much as anything by the departments of planning, regional science, and other interdiscriplinary fields. This generalization is perhaps particularly true should we extend our interests to social change, where the domain of sociology departments becomes a factor. Policy analysis of social change propositions (as distinct from purely descriptive and theoretical perspectives) is probably contrary to the main thrust of a social science, which is to remain unfettered by considerations of policy.

Both the supply of social theory and its consumption for policy purposes are more apt to be determined by developments in planning and other policy-oriented, interdisciplinary fields, than in the traditional social science departments./23 There is some reason to be particularly optimistic about planning departments in this context because of the juxtaposition of the efficiency and redistributive subcultures noted above.

In addition, the external environments of planning departments may impose demands for redistributive knowledge. To be sure, some have claimed the

contrary: the main response, they say, has been a technocratic elaboration of methodology in response to some of the most bureaucratic institutions of the society, perhaps epitomized by the program budgeting techniques first introduced in the Department of Defense and later spread throughout much of the federal establishment and to state and municipal bureaucracies./24 On the other hand, we would point to the possibility that with the introduction of great numbers of highly educated and relatively secure technical personnel, bureaucracies may loosen their constraints on change and mobility./25 Without necessarily intending to, the educational processes supplying technically trained people are also enhancing entrepreneurial capacity in the lower and middle reaches of the bureaucracies. Growing tendencies of public employees to strike, and the near rebellions in the federal domestic establishment in the more recent stages of the Vietnam War are at least partly explained by this interpretation. What has happened is that there are larger numbers of people in the bureaucracies with more ideas of how to respond to an ever increasing and more articulate set of clienteles. Despite the official ideologies set at the top, these new program ideas of these people have at least the potential of developing and creating a demand for the redistributive concerns we have mentioned.

V. Possible Impacts of Planning on the Society

The developments in the types of knowledge focussed on, should they occur in planning schools, can have interesting implications for the profession and the society. One is to move the profession into areas that have previously been rigidly restricted: purposive social change of the whole system, a much more delicate subject than advocacy for particular groups. With this, a second implication: the great danger of social predictive power being used on behalf of some parts of the system (e.g. elites) against others. Both or either of these developments, if perceived, are enough to block any conceptual extension of planning beyond the point it is now at, but we will pursue our thoughts further in this direction, nonetheless.

As long as planners confine themselves to a concern with system efficiency or with the needs of particular groups, their professional roles will be definable: they can fall back on special bodies of knowledge (--land use relationships, cost-benefit and other forms of analysis--) and their special advocacy functions for their clienteles. What they can do and cannot do will be fairly clear, to themselves at least. If, however, planners begin to acquire the new knowledge in distributive measurement and redistributive social processes we projected above, they will be in a position to suggest changes in the way the system is constructed, including the relative power of different parts of the system. This would constitute a capacity to be responsive to different groups contending for participation and power in the system; to communicate conceptually even with other planners, working as advocates in the employ of the latter groups. One can imagine some degree of circulation in employment between planners working on these problems at the

system level, and, intermittently, immersed in the employ of particular groups. Such alternate employment in phases now occurs in many cities. We do not suggest that the relations between system level and advocate planners would result in compromise and cooperation very often. Conflict, hard bargaining and confrontation would occur; it might develop into a more regular procedure, in fact. But with the existence of planners equipped with data and a conceptual scheme which includes information on distribution, group solidarity, and system linkages and other characteristics conducive to distributional changes, it will both be easier for system level elites to respond to demands, and for groups struggling for power to formulate them in ways that have a chance of success.

Unfortunately, the notion of such a new type of system level role for planners may seem not to have a chance of being tried. While it has always been legitimate to propose things for the greater efficiency of the system, or for the interests of particular groups, attempts to recast the priorities of the system are usually viewed as the exclusive province of the political process and as something that happens as a result of a lot of smaller steps boiled together in the lawmaking process, not something to be articulated at one time by professionals. On the other hand, this probably varies with the times, and in times of apparent crisis, lawmakers and others are apt to look for ideas from any quarter, including planners./26 In fact, our political norms and our professional restraint may be out of date even now. We may have, in the near future, four major political parties rather than two, each needing to formulate a picture of the whole system for each city. In addition, higher levels of government as well as privately based interest groups are increasingly interested in whole systems. This may portend a demand for planners at state and regional levels with similar interests to those working as advocates of non-governmental groups in cities.

A second objection that may be raised to the notion of planners concerning themselves with redistribution is that techniques and measurement with the ability to predict--say--group solidarity movements are more apt to fall into the hands of elites than anyone else, and be turned as an instrument against the real interests of such movements. There are two answers to this which come to mind. One is that despite the short run concentration of new techniques in the hands of a few, the inherent tendencies of scientific and intellectual advances--in contrast to more primitive power resources--is for relatively wide distribution. At the very least, one can look for elite competition being increased by such advances.

Another argument, however, is more difficult. Despite such long run --and limited--equalization, will there not remain a large number of persons, left behind in any general advance in knowledge and whose main characteristic is lack of access to any but the most primitive power resources: strikes, hijacking, riots? What good will social prediction do them? The best answer we have is this: the modern sectors will persist, nevertheless, and any

groups seeking power must recognize this. This being so, the only routes to power remaining open will entail alliances with groups who do have the capacity to understand and make political capital out of social prediction techniques. That such alliances are possible is not purely a matter of faith. Chavez and the grape strikers and the Black Panthers are but two groups who have found real or potential allies among the knowledge-oriented middle class or its radical offshoots. We expect more of this kind of productive activity in the future.

FOOTNOTES

1. Paul Goodman (1969) gives a frightening example of the use of statistical decision making in the Vietnam War.

2. See John Dyckman (1963) and Thomas Reiner (1964).

3. For different emphases see Francis Fox Piven (1970), T. J. Kent (1964) and Mel Weber (1963).

4. Francis Fox Piven (1970).

5. Thus, an emphasis on disruptive techniques for successful planning, Ibid.

6. In this same vein Wassily Leontief (1968) criticizes national policies maximizing economic growth.

7. This has been amply illustrated in well known works, such as those by Michael Harrington.

8. Chester Hartman, (July, 1970).

9. Wassily Leontief (1968), again has convergent views.

10. Much of this work is published under the auspices of the Regional Science Association.

11. For example, John Kain and Joseph Persky (1969) ignore critical issues of implementation in their discussion of alternatives to ghetto development. Thomas Vietorisz, in a United Nations document, cogently argues for recognition of positive--polarizing--feedback mechanisms that increase inequality.

12. See Koichi Mera (1968) and Thomas Reiner (1964).

13. See Thomas Vietorisz (1967), Koichi Mera (1968, 1970) and William Baumol (1967)

14. See Thomas Vietorisz and Bennett Harrison (1970), Stanislaw Czamanski (1969) and Hollis Chenery (1962).

15. See Barclay G. Jones and William W. Goldsmith (1968) and Emil Malizia (1969).

16. See Barclay G. Jones, et al. (1967).

17. Benjamin Chinitz (1961) has some intriguing ideas here.

18. See Stephen Rattien (1970).

19. Arnold Nadler (1970) suggested a number of these considerations.

20. Alan Altshuler (1969).

21. The most widely known statement is contained in J. Reiner, E. Reimer and T. A. Reiner (1963).

22. The underlying theoretical scheme is outlined in Young (1970). An example of a policy application is contained in Clavel, Capener and Jones (1969).

23. Campbell (1969) makes a persuasive argument for the potential strength of interdisciplinary research and teaching efforts.

24. Piven (1970) argues that recent changes in various professional curricula have been conditioned more by changes in demands for personnel made by institutions in their external environments than by internal decisions. See also Webber (1963).

25. Considerable support for this view is provided, at least implicitly, by Victor Thompson (1961).

26. Relevant to this, see the arguments made by Gans (1970) on the desirability of "policy catalogues", lists of goals for society drawn from different political perspectives.

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